

Playing Fields Task Force Meeting
Friday, February 16, 2007
7:45 am
Warren Building

Attendees: Carl Fleischer, Jan Kaseta, Shelly Ironside, Matt Chin, Melissa Anderson, Jim Conlin (all Rec), Steve Fader (DPW), Bill Charlton (BPW), Owen Dugan (Selectman), Mike Jennings (Lacrosse), Elliott Pratt (Soccer), Bill Seymour (Gale Associates), Suzy Littlefield (School Committee), David Himmelberger (Selectman, Sprague parent), John Brown (WHS), Curt Smith (WLL), Marijane Tuohy (Advisory), Kim Mahoney (Oak St resident), Kate Klenk (Sprague PTO President), Liz Rogers (Sprague parent), Bob Finnegan (Oak St resident), Thomas Brown (Oak St resident), Jim Hayes (Oak St resident, Wellesley Times Magazine), Nancy Perlmutter (Sprague parent), Vin Montali (Oak St resident), Denise Brown (Oak St resident)

Approval of minutes from last meeting: The minutes from February 2, 2007 were approved.

Playing Fields Task Force Business:

Advisory has requested that PFTF members be at the March 6 meeting.

Mike Jennings reported on the CPC meeting Feb 15. It was suggested at the CPC meeting that PFTF should take a formal vote that all youth sports user groups agree to increase user fees from \$15 to \$27.

PFTF cannot take a vote. The individual boards must vote on policy change. A letter of support will be needed from each Board. Carl will draft wording for Board support of an increase in User Fees.

Next Meeting: The next PFTF meeting will be Friday, March 2 at 7:45 am at the Warren Building to talk about the Sprague Project.

Citizen Speak: Sprague neighbors were present to address their concerns about the proposed synthetic turf at Sprague Fields. Carl briefly explained the nature of the project and then Carl and Bill Seymour of Gale responded to questions.

Kim Mahoney asked how PFTF members were selected and requested a copy of the PFTF Charter. Carl explained that in this case, the PFTF has looked into the Sprague Field remediation on behalf of the School Committee to come up with a solution and make a recommendation.

David Himmelberger asked about the temporary nets and when they would be up. No final decision has been made. He was also concerned about the fencing. Lacrosse currently uses the fields without fencing. Could abutters request no fencing?

The fencing was put in the plan to protect the Town's investment. Spectators would be outside the fence. There will be no gum allowed on the synthetic turf fields. Carl stressed that user groups and Sprague children will have to be educated not to discard gum on the fields.

Bill Seymour emphasized the durability of synthetic fields. They may be used every day as much as possible. Fields will not fail from overuse but from UV exposure. The fibers will become brittle. According to Seymour, reasons for fencing are:

- 1) To preclude vehicular traffic
- 2) To limit people walking on & off with dirty shoes
- 3) To keep non participants off the playing surfaces

Liz Rogers, a Sprague parent, didn't understand why if there is no limit to play, they need to protect the fields.

Bob Finnegan of Oak St was concerned about the durability of the fields. He suggested that there will not be enough funding later on to maintain the fields.

The issue of dog waste was addressed. From PFTF perspective, they do not want dog waste in areas where children play.

David Himmelberger suggested that the PFTF consider a premium grass field next to Sprague and one synthetic turf field. Perhaps the savings could be invested in another synthetic field elsewhere in town.

Carl responded that 25% of Wellesley children use Sprague Fields and that the fields are a Town asset rather than a community field. Doing two separate fields would be more expensive. Carl also brought up the scarcity of Town fields and the need for increased use of existing fields.

Bob Finnegan stated that the scarcity of fields is a short term problem but this is a permanent solution. He thinks the town should be made aware of this structural change.

Denise Brown asked if fences will be locked. The fences will not be locked; they are there merely to discourage traffic, but not prohibit it.

David Himmelberger suggested that the High School Football field is underutilized and would be a more appropriate location for synthetic turf. Carl responded that originally the plan was to install synthetic turf at the High School complex. That initiative will continue when it is clear what will happen with the High School. In the meantime, the fields at Sprague need remediation, so the PFTF is just trying to pursue the opportunity for synthetic turf there.

Jim Conlin spoke about CPC funding. Part of the funding for this project will come from CPC. CPC funding is unlikely to be available for other playing fields in town, so this is an opportunity to take advantage of.

Kim Mahoney felt that the PFTF does not give a balanced viewpoint, since it is comprised of user groups. Carl responded that the people affected the most by the fields are the user groups.

Tom Brown requested that the neighbors receive assurance that lighting will not be included in the plan. Carl said that although conduit will be installed for the scoreboard and cable TV, there is no intention to install lights at Sprague presently. Any future plan for lights would require a long, defined process.

Mike Jennings requested that Bill Seymour talk about the rubber infill. All infill materials are sand or sand and rubber. The rubber is ground tires. This is a 30 year old technology that is highly regulated. The materials have been designated non-toxic.

There has been a lot of misinformation about the effect of heat on synthetic turf. Gale has accumulated data from users of synthetic turf that states that heat is not a big issue. Bill directed neighbors to a list of schools that Gale has installed fields for and invited them to call the Athletic Directors and ask about heat problems.

Tom Brown asked about the potential problems for elementary school children, who are closer to the fields. Bill referred him to Lucas Murray at Boston Parks & Recreation.

Watering is occasionally needed to cool fields or to wash blood or vomit. Synthetic turf is more environmentally friendly since ground water is not used to irrigate fields.

There was a question about the use of disinfectants on the fields. Bill Seymour responded that synthetic turf has no more propensity for pathogens than natural on outdoor fields.

David Himmelberger asked about testing on infill materials, and possible ingestion by children. He also asked about injury. Seymour responded that synthetic turf is as safe as high quality turf in terms of injury. Nancy Perlmutter said the Netherlands did a worst case analysis in case of children swallowing or inhaling pellets and there was no problem.

Kate Klenk asked how long fields would be out of use. For synthetic turf, fields would be out of use 90 – 110 days. If construction began in May, fields would be ready in August. With regard to sod, the fields would be out of use approximately 8 months, possibly longer.

Financial

The CPC approved \$645,000 towards synthetic turf fields. CPC felt that synthetic turf was a better choice.

David Himmelberger suggested putting the money towards natural remediation. Carl displayed the table of cost analysis. The incremental cost to the Town is less with synthetic turf.

Bob Finnegan said that the chart should include the replacement cost. It was pointed out that the replacement cost for synthetic turf was included. But Finnegan suggested that the cost could fluctuate, and therefore may not be accurate. Mike Jennings responded that the current numbers are a conservative estimate.

David Himmelberger asked about drainage and whether a premium natural field would drain better. Bill Seymour responded that currently the fields do not drain well. In order to improve drainage, Gale would need to install a sand based field, but they don't recommend sand based fields near elementary schools. Sand based fields require fertilizer four times a year and water twice a week.

Bill Seymour listed the reasons for choosing synthetic turf:

- 1) all weather availability
- 2) increased use
- 3) substantial reduction in maintenance costs.

Curt Smith mentioned that Little League currently spends about \$15 - \$20,000 a year above and beyond DPW budget and user fees.

The user group increases will be included in amended Field Policy.

It was explained that the User Fund is under control of the DPW. In order to expend money, DPW needs to consult with Rec and NRC.

User fees will be lowered when the field is paid off.

Bob Finnegan was skeptical about the cost analysis, saying that a lot could change in the next 15 years. Bill Seymour responded that due to advanced technology newer fields will likely outperform older fields and last twice as long. The newer fields are more durable, but the price has stayed the same.